Archeological Monitoring of Parging Trenches
600/602 North Second Street
Maggie L. Walker National Historic Site
Richmond, Virginia

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INTRODUCTION

The Maggie L. Walker National Historic Site, located in Richmond, Virginia, was the home of a leading figure in the self-improvement and self-empowerment movement of black Americans in the early twentieth century. Founder of the largest black-owned bank of its day, guiding member of the Independent Order of St. Luke, member of the NAACP Board of Directors and numerous other public organizations, she was a principal figure in Richmond's Jackson Ward from 1900 to 1934. Jackson Ward, now a National Historic Landmark District, was the center of black social and business life in Richmond and probably the foremost black business community in the nation (GMP:4) during Ms. Walker's occupation.

The park is composed of Ms. Walker's house and adjacent structures on the northwest corner of East Leigh and Second Streets. These buildings form a roughly square interior area that the NPS is developing for visitor use (Figure 1).

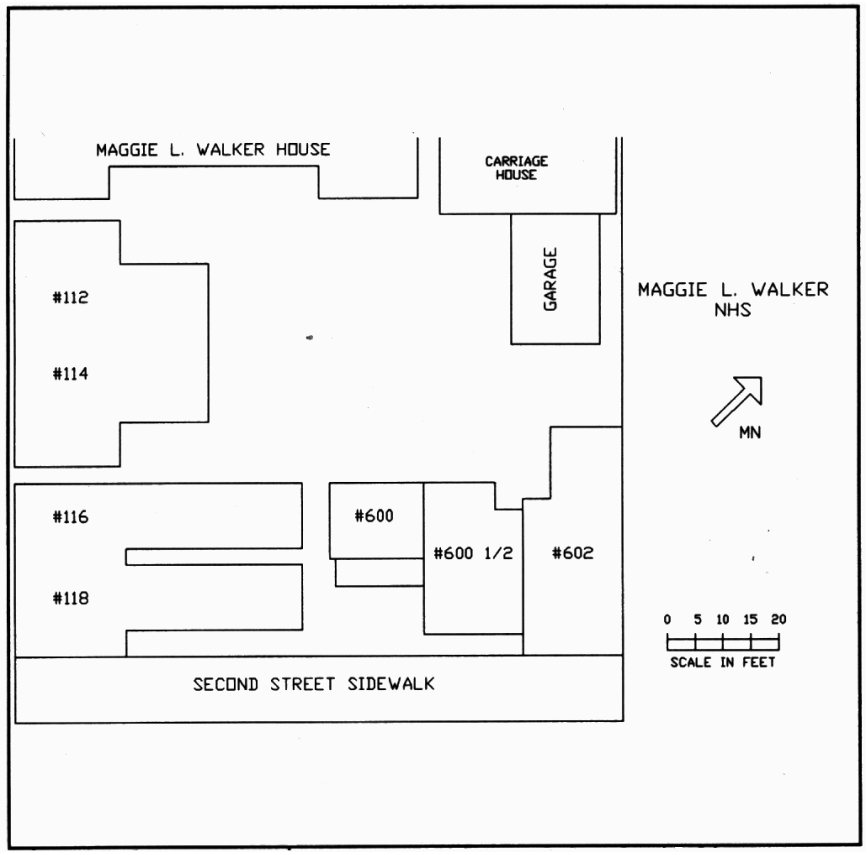

Figure 1: Interior space formed by building complex.

The park is currently implementing the 1982 GMP that identified the structures at 114, 116, and 118 Fast Leigh Street and 600 and 602 Second Street as the Adaptive Use/Visitor complex and Administrative Services Subzone. Stabilization of the structures at 600 and 602 Second Street required parging the foundation wall with cement, and installation of a perimeter drain to prevent water intrusion into both buildings (Figure 2).

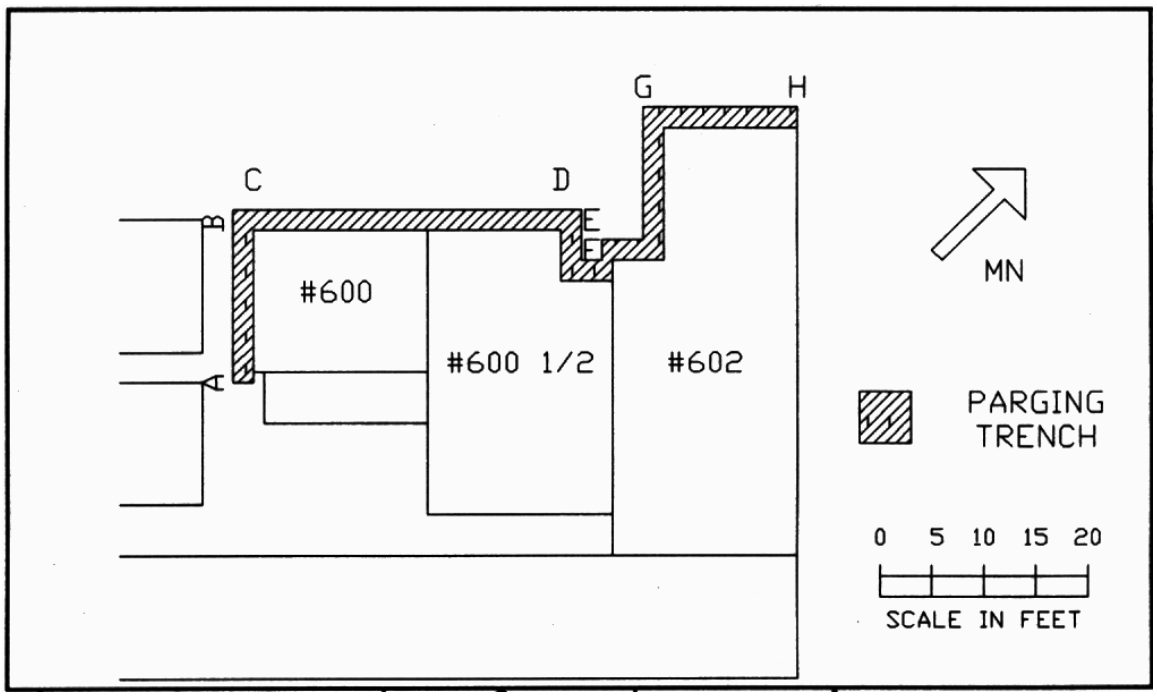

Figure 2: Location of parging trench.

Under Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act, this construction was monitored for the presence of archeological resources by MARO Archeologist Alien H. Cooper between March 22 and 24, 1994.

FIELD METHODS

Archeological monitoring was conducted by directly observing excavations in progress. Structural features, as well as complete Boil profiles were recorded by measured drawings and photographs. Soil colors were identified by reference to the Munsell Soil Color Chart. Excavation was

suspended when archeological features were identified. All excavations were manually dug, allowing for excellent subsurface visibility. Artifacts were collected from the project, although materials recovered in the field were scrutinized for information on the date and nature of their associated deposits.

RESULTS OF INVESTIGATIONS

Stratigraphy

Archeological monitoring indicated that most of the area within the construction trenches had been disturbed by reconstruction of the rear walls of 600/602 Second Street. Relatively intact soil profiles were recovered from the southern and western margins which may be useful in interpreting the formation of the interior space between the buildings.

Three strata are generally present across the site (Figure 3). The first, a thin (less than 0.2 foot thick) lens of recently deposited light yellowish brown (Munsell color 10YR 5/4) sandy loam, was deposited within the past decade. The second, a thick layer of sandy loam containing a high percentage of coal ash and silt, occurs across the entire site to varying depths, often in excess of two feet. Its excessive depth reflects previous wall reconstruction efforts. This can be clearly seen in profile section A-B, the first ten feet of section C-D, and most of section G-H where, in its clearly undisturbed state, its thickness is frequently less than 0.8 feet. This thickness is similar to that near the cinder block garage, away from the disturbances from reconstruction. This stratum contained a large quantity of glass artifacts, with about equal quantities of tableware and containers represented. All glass appeared to postdate 1914 with a marked absence of manganese or selenium glass. A small quantity of whiteware ceramics and food remains (large mammal, possibly cow and pig) were also included in the assemblage. Except for a few small medicine bottles, all of this material was highly fragmented. The third stratum, consisting of yellowish brown clay, underlay the entire site and contained no cultural materials. This is undoubtedly the subsoil. No buried soil horizons were identified that could be attributed to the original ground cover of the site prior to the late nineteenth century. Examination of the

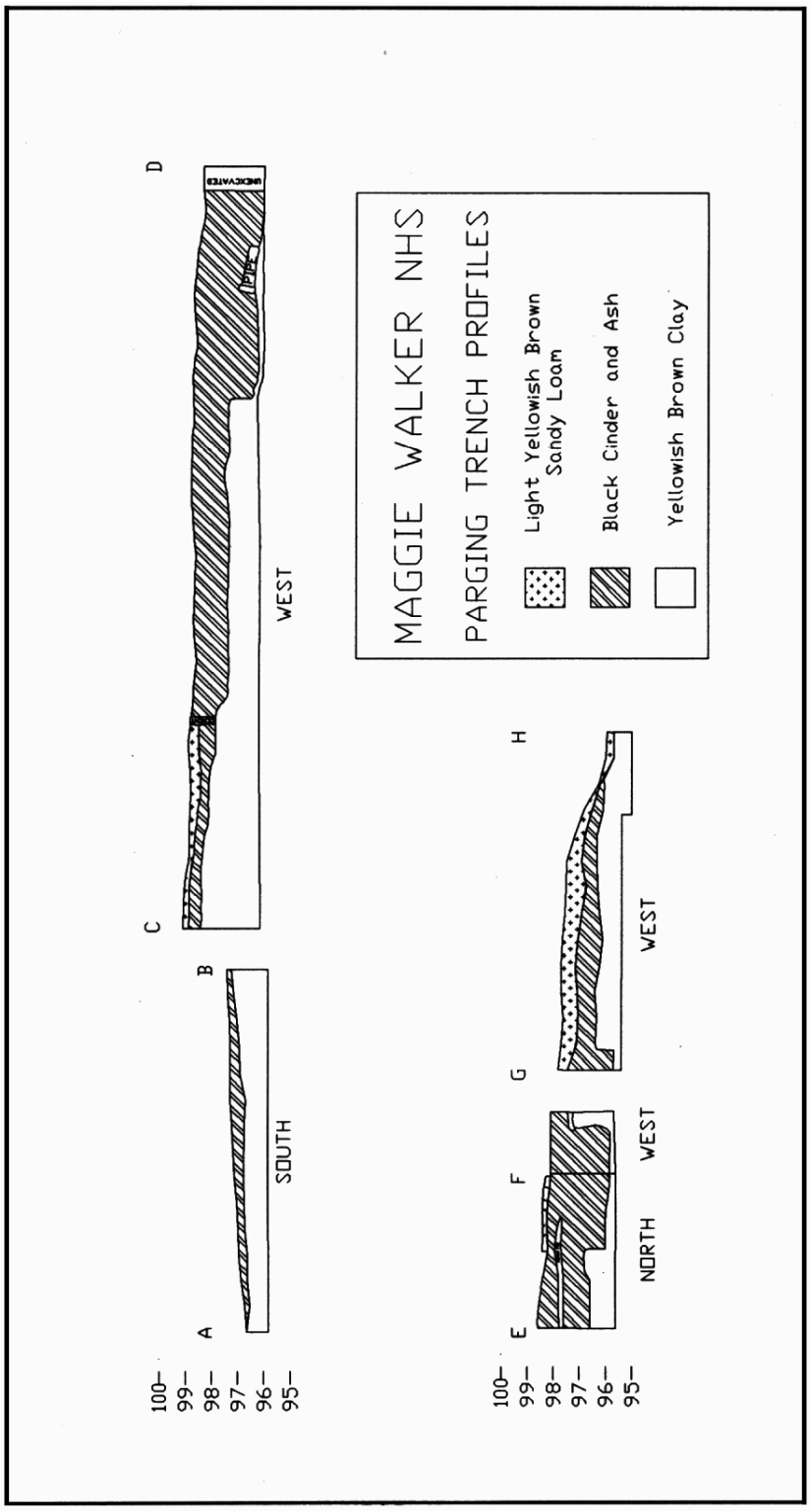

Figure 3: Measured drawing of parging trenches.

elevation change of the clay stratum between the adjacent profile points B and C (a difference of almost one foot), indicate that the topsoil was removed from the entire building perimeter prior to construction down to bare clay (or that it had eroded away) and that part of the clay from the footing (or cellar) excavations had been deposited against 600 Second Street. This would put the original grade of the clay subsoil at around 96.5 feet, which is roughly where it appears across the undisturbed portions of the profile.

Features

Structural features were identified during the monitoring project at two locations; a brick paving extending from the common alley between 116/118 East Leigh Street, and a relieving arch in the foundation of 600 Second Street beneath the door.

The paving feature behind 118 East Leigh Street was constructed of building brick, extending 2.6 feet from the intersection of the alleys between 116/118 East Leigh and 600 Second Streets (Figures 4 and 5). Subsurface probing and direct observation where it is pierced by a downspout indicated that this feature extends to within 7.2 feet of the south juncture of the two buildings. It begins slightly north of the alley door of 116 East Leigh and certainly is related to the door's location. The paving mostly covered by cement paving except the portion which extends into the alley which was uncovered by excavation. Beginning immediately beneath the surface, the paving rests directly on the layer of ash and cinder which overlays the entire site. Its date is ambiguous since the date of deposition for the ash layer presumably postdates 1915.

The relieving arch beneath the rear door to 600 Second Street (Figures 6 and 7), contained a shallow trench which ran through the arch and beneath the foundation. The depth of the arch suggests its function as an airway, since only a small portion of its face extended above the surrounding clay subsoil. A partial basement in this structure was identified during interior rehabilitation work by the Regional Archeologist. This arch probably provided ventilation to that space.

Figure 4: Photograph of paving feature between 116 and 188 East Leigh Street.

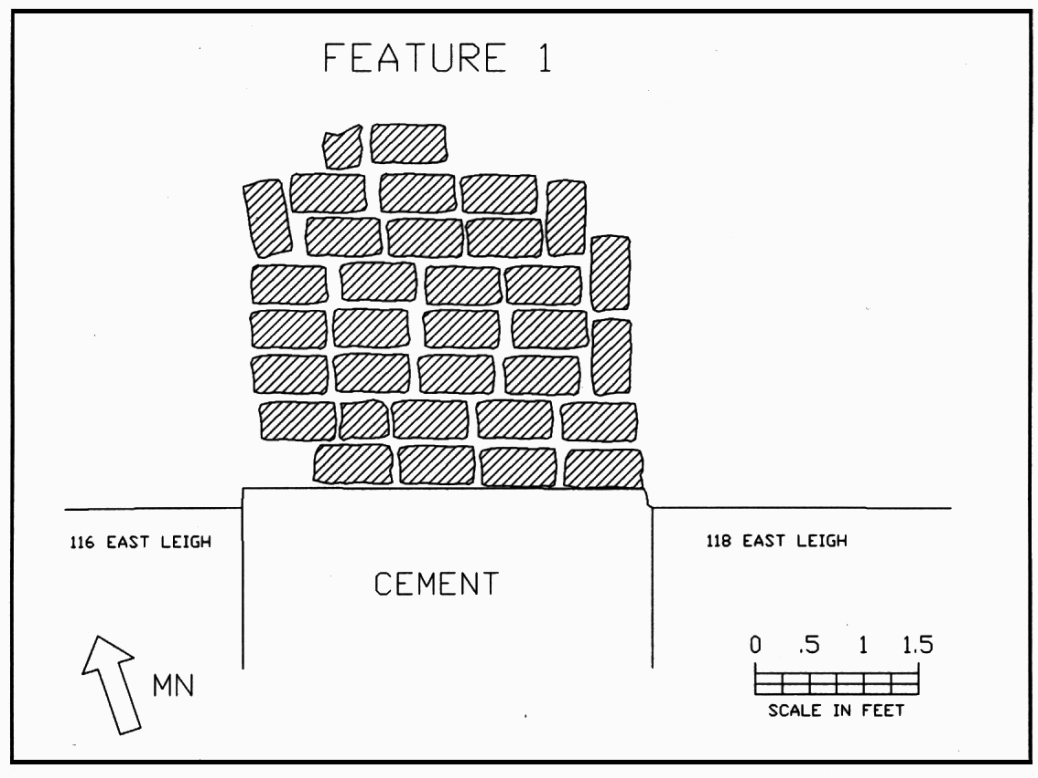

Figure 5: Drawing of plan view of paving feature between 116 and 118 East Leigh Street.

Figure 6: Relieving arch in west foundation of 600 1/2 North Second Street.

Figure 7: Relieving arch in west foundation of 600 1/2 North Second Street.

INTERPRETATION

Interpretation of the uppermost strata, deposited by the park service in an attempt to manage site drainage has no significance. The site-wide distribution of the ash layer, especially considering its thickness away from the disturbed areas, suggest that it is an accretional deposit resulting from long-term occupation of the site and reflects both discard activities within the yard and activities occurring within the structures. As a result, where undisturbed, this strata represents a significant resource with great information potential. This layer appears to postdate the earliest occupation of the site and reflects activities dating after 1915. The clay subsoil is culturally sterile and has no significance excepting those areas which may potentially contain intrusive features, either structural or depositional.

The proposed grading plan will result in a built elevation of 97.36 feet, with drainage features extending to 96.12 feet. Assuming an aggregate base of 0.8 feet, these activities will effectively remove all soils relating to the occupation of the adjacent structures during the park's (and NHL's) period of significance.

FOLLOW-UP

The information provided by the archeological monitoring project will be used to guide the excavations for the archeological survey of the yard area. Although identification of additional archeological strata is expected during the survey, examination of the soils adjacent to the 600/602 complex of buildings during monitoring combined with the results of the survey, will establish the integrity and significance of the overall yard area.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The archeological monitoring at MAWA received absolute support from Superintendent Cynthia MacLeod and her staff, especially Chief of Maintenance Jerry Helton and Park Curator, Hyman Schwartzberg. The staff of Techon, Inc. of Norfolk, Virginia gracefully cooperated with the archeological demands of the project and are to be commended as well.